

Marilyn and Joe

In 1951, one of the most talked about romances of the decade began with a blind date. Joe DiMaggio, the famed New York Yankees' centerfielder, met Marilyn Monroe, a semi-obscure contract player.

DiMaggio was in Los Angeles for a few days, and a mutual friend thought perhaps he and Marilyn would enjoy spending an evening together. Marilyn had never been to a baseball game and had never heard of Joe DiMaggio or the New York Yankees.

In Marilyn's autobiography, *My Story*, published a few years after their meeting, Marilyn says of that first night: "I had thought I was going to meet a loud, sporty fellow. Instead I found myself smiling at a reserved gentleman in a gray suit, with a gray tie and a sprinkle of gray in his hair. There were a few blue polka dots in his tie. If I hadn't been told he was some sort of ball player, I would have guessed he was either a steel magnate or a congressman."

The club where they were introduced was a favorite of DiMaggio's on Los Angeles' Sunset Strip. The two had drinks with a group of friends, neither talking much until Marilyn asked Joe if he liked spaghetti. With a name like DiMaggio, Joe explained, you grow up eating a lot of spaghetti. In fact, his family owned an Italian restaurant in San Francisco. Marilyn invited Joe back to her apartment for a spaghetti dinner, and they became fast friends.

Joe was a simple man with simple tastes, quiet and undemonstrative. Marilyn, after years of being hounded by aggressive men, found him charming.

Because Marilyn was becoming known as a glamorous screen personality and Joe was the Yankee's greatest baseball player since Babe Ruth, they were constantly photographed when they began dating. Soon the couple became the public's favorite item of gossip.

Marilyn enjoyed the attention, but of Joe she said, "He dislikes being photographed or interviewed. If he is even so much as asked to participate in some publicity stunt he registers a big explosion."

Though their careers demanded much of their time and took them all over the country,

they managed to spend most of their free time together. The hectic pace continued for two years. Finally, in 1954, they were married.

The marriage lasted only nine months. Differences that were not important in courtship became insurmountable in marriage. One of the problems was Joe's jealousy. He wanted Marilyn to himself, to be his wife and hopefully mother to his children. He didn't want her to be America's sweetheart. But Marilyn had worked hard to become an actress and wasn't prepared to give it up.

The problem became insoluble while Marilyn was filming "The Seven Year Itch" (1955) in New York. At one point in the movie, Marilyn stands over a subway grid and wind from the subway blows up her skirt, exposing the length of her legs. Joe, who had been watching the filming, left in a fury. The couple reportedly argued long into the night. They flew back to Los Angeles and two weeks later announced their divorce.

Marilyn and Joe, however, continued their friendship. A few months after the divorce, they went together to the premiere of "The Seven Year Itch." Over the ensuing years they continued to see each other. In Joe, Marilyn had found someone who truly cared for her, a friend who offered support and loyalty.

Joe courts Marilyn, 1952.



Hollywood

In the years 1953 to 1955, Marilyn made six movies. There was not a great deal of variety in the roles she played, but with each film she established herself more and more as indispensable to the Hollywood power elite. The problem for Marilyn as an actress was that she played the dimwitted blonde and the sexy vamp too well. Twentieth Century-Fox was interested only in box-office sales and was not about to give her a serious dramatic role. They had spent a lot of money perfecting her "image"; they were not eager for audiences to see her in another, more subtle, light.

In both "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" (1953) and "How to Marry a Millionaire" (1953),

As Pola, wearing glasses but still glamorous, in "How to Marry a Millionaire" (1953).



(1953), Marilyn played a giddy woman whose single goal in life was to find a rich husband. During the filming of these movies, Marilyn, when not on the set, read books: literary classics, philosophy, history, etc. Intensely aware of her lack of formal education, she was trying to "catch up," but studio crew and staff unsympathetically laughed at her. She was once told by a studio executive to stop reading *The Autobiography of Lincoln Stephens* because it was dangerous to be seen with radical literature in public. In such an atmosphere, Marilyn had to fight hard to find her own identity.

By the end of 1954, after making "River of No Return" (1954) and "There's No Business Like Show Business" (1954), Marilyn was an established star. What she wanted more than anything else, however, was recognition as a serious actress. She enjoyed being a comedienne, making an audience laugh, but not when she felt it was at her expense.

To an interviewer she once pleaded, "Please don't make me a joke. End the interview with what I believe . . . I don't mind making jokes but I don't want to look like one. I want to be an artist, an actress with integrity."

Marilyn was eager to work with director Billy Wilder in "The Seven Year Itch." Her role as "The Girl" would be substantially the same as roles she had played in the past, but the script was meaty enough for her to exhibit a broader range of talent. The movie, released in 1955, received rave reviews. Norman Mailer in his biography, *Marilyn*, says of her: "As The Girl upstairs, a TV model in New York for the summer from Colorado, she creates one last American innocent, a pristine artifact of the mid-Eisenhower years, an American girl who believes in the products she sells in TV commercials — she is simple and healthy as the whole middle of the country, and there to be plucked."

Although Marilyn's marriage with DiMaggio was breaking up while she was filming "The Seven Year Itch," that she was able to bring such warmth, joy and innocence to her role, is a tribute to her as an actress.



A souvenir for a fan, 1952.



Taking a break from work, 1953.



With co-star Betty Grable in "How to Marry a Millionaire" (1953).

Marilyn Monroe, Actress

With the success of "The Seven Year Itch," Marilyn proved, if not the full range of her dramatic potential, her power over audiences and her importance to Twentieth Century-Fox executives. At last, studio heads began to talk about renegotiating her contract. ("Niagara," "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" and "How to Marry a Millionaire" grossed over \$25,000,000 for the studio — more than any other star earned for a studio in 1953 — yet Marilyn, at a salary of less than \$10,000 a week, earned far

less than most top stars.) With studio executives wooing her, Marilyn could now begin calling some of her own shots.

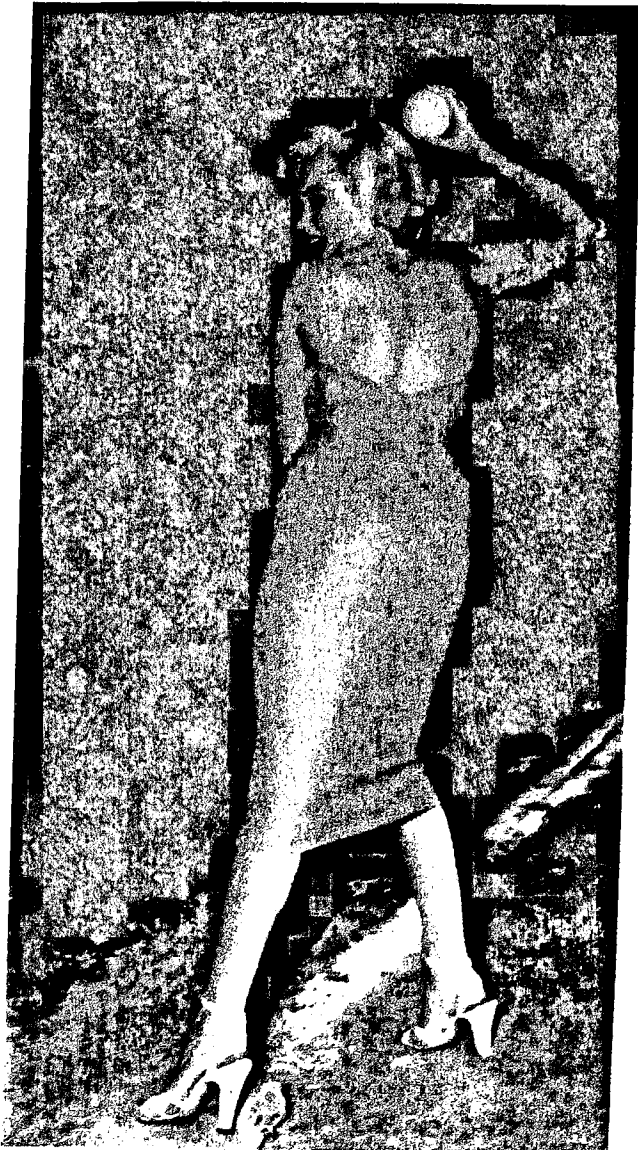
In December of 1954, New York fashion photographer, Milton Greene, flew to Los Angeles to talk to Marilyn about setting up her own production company. Greene, a personal friend, knew that Marilyn was eager to break away from the "mindless blonde" image that she had acquired as a result of the narrow range of roles she had been given to play. To enable her to choose what roles she wanted, Greene proposed that the two of them return to New York and form a partnership, to be called Marilyn Monroe Productions.

Marilyn was thrilled with the idea of having her own company. The idea of moving to New York was also appealing; she had been humiliated time and again by the Hollywood power structure and was ready to start anew in New York. Registering at the Los Angeles airport as "Zelda Zonk," Marilyn flew to New York with Milton Greene. Within three weeks, Marilyn Monroe Productions was a reality.

Another reason Marilyn chose to move to New York was to take dramatic instruction from Lee and Paula Strasberg at the Actors Studio in Manhattan. The Actors Studio had been the training ground for Marlon Brando, Rod Steiger, Julie Harris, Maureen Stapleton, Montgomery Clift and many other highly respected actors. Marilyn felt that with similar training she too could be a serious, dramatic actress. During her first days in New York, a reporter asked her, "What makes you think you can play serious roles?" Marilyn quietly replied, "Some people have more scope than other people think they have." Her response was typical — indirect, non-aggressive . . . only hinting at a deep, inner strength.

At the Actors Studio, Marilyn received the encouragement and support she desperately needed. The Strasbergs used what was called the "method" approach to acting, a system of dramatic training developed in Russia early in the Twentieth Century by Konstantin Stanislavski. The idea behind method acting is that each

A provocative pitching pose, 1954.



actor uses his or her own sense memories, his or her own experiences, to enrich a role. The emphasis is not on learning a part by rote, but on analyzing a character's circumstances, needs and motivations. By so doing, the actor can "get inside" a part.

For Marilyn, this approach meant resurrecting a part of herself she had tried to forget: the pain and the loneliness of the child Norma Jean. With the Strasbergs' help, however, she learned that her youthful years had left a wealth of emotion for the actress Marilyn to draw upon.

The Strasbergs hoped that Marilyn would eventually act on the stage. In preparation, she appeared at the Actors Studio in Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire," and Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie." Lee Strasberg was impressed with the range of Marilyn's talent. He told director Joshua Logan that he had "encountered two film personalities of really great potential . . . at the Studio; Marlon Brando, and quite as good as Brando is Marilyn."

After nearly a year of training with the Strasbergs, Marilyn, as head of Marilyn Monroe Productions, was ready to sign a new contract with Twentieth Century-Fox. Milton Greene negotiated the new, tremendously improved contract.

In March of 1956, Marilyn returned to Hollywood to star in William Inge's "Bus Stop" (1956), which was to be directed by Joshua Logan. With Marilyn was Paula Strasberg, who had agreed to be Marilyn's dramatic coach on the set.

Marilyn's performance in "Bus Stop" was considered by many to be the finest of her career. Her character, Cherie, is a saloon singer who can't sing. "I've been tryin' to be somebody," Cherie laments, "like Hildegarde."

Throughout the film, she calls herself a "chantoose," a deliberate mispronunciation of the French "chanteuse." Marilyn strongly identified with the character of Cherie, since she herself had often been ridiculed for a lack of formal education.

Near the end of "Bus Stop," Cherie pleads for a man "I can look up to and admire,



Marilyn wows G.I.'s in Korea, 1954.

During entertainment tour of Korea, 1954.



but I don't want him to browbeat me." The scene was so powerful emotionally for Marilyn that director Logan was never able to get one complete take. Each time, at some point in the dialogue, Marilyn would break into tears, unable to go on.

In many ways, "Bus Stop" as a film-script was weak, but Marilyn's talent and imagination made the character Cherie come alive. Instead of accepting the frilly costumes given her, Marilyn rummaged through Fox's wardrobe department and found the darned stockings and seedy lame coat with the monkey-fur she wears in the film. She also had the idea of using very white make-up to underscore Cherie's weak, pathetic nature.



Two members of the Actors Studio, Marilyn Monroe and Marlon Brando, 1955.

Marilyn serves as usherette at the premiere of "East of Eden" — a benefit for the Actors Studio, 1955.



When "Bus Stop" was released, critics viewed Marilyn as a serious actress for the first time in her career. Much to her disappointment, however, she was not nominated for an Academy Award.

Marilyn's next film, "The Prince and the Showgirl" (1957), was an adaptation of Terence Rattigan's stage play, "The Sleeping Prince." Laurence Olivier and his wife Vivien Leigh had been in the original London production; naturally, Milton Greene, having purchased the rights to the play, wanted Olivier for the movie. Olivier agreed not only to co-star opposite Marilyn, but also to direct the film.

Unfortunately, problems arose on the set from the very beginning. Marilyn had been tremendously eager to work with Laurence Olivier, generally acclaimed as the world's greatest actor. Playing opposite him had seemed to her the epitome of artistic success. She was unhappy, though, with her role as Elsie, a dimwitted, sexy chorus girl. Olivier wasn't sympathetic to her dissatisfaction over the part, and the two became locked in combat. To Marilyn, playing Elsie was a backward step, not the progression she hoped would follow "Bus

Stop." In addition to these differences with Olivier, she felt betrayed by Milton Greene, who had promised to place her in serious, dramatic roles. (Though Marilyn belittled her part, she later received the David D. Donatello Award for her performance.)

As a result of conflicts during the filming of "The Prince and the Showgirl," Marilyn's close friendship with Milton Greene ended, and Marilyn Monroe Productions was dissolved.

Marilyn, determined to be very careful about her next movie, rejected the role of Sugar Kane in "Some Like It Hot" (1959) when the script was first brought to her attention. Sugar Kane was again a "dumb blonde," this time duped by Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis who impersonate women in a jazz band to escape gangsters. Sugar Kane is so imperceptive she believes that Lemmon and Curtis are actually women.

On the other hand, Marilyn greatly respected Billy Wilder, the film's director, with whom she had worked on "The Seven Year Itch." Under financial pressure, she allowed Wilder to change her mind about accepting the part.

Filming "Some Like It Hot" proved difficult for Marilyn. Norman Mailer, in his biography *Marilyn*, describes her efforts: "She has to surmount such tension (personal and professional) in order to present herself to the world as that figure of immaculate tenderness, utter bewilderment, and goofy dipsomaniacal sweetness which is Sugar Kane . . . It will yet be her greatest creation and her greatest film."

Because of illness and fatigue, Marilyn had a hard time remembering her lines, which aggravated Wilder and fellow actors. She also insisted on playing Sugar Kane her way, much to Wilder's consternation. Only Paula Strasberg, who continued to be her coach and confidant, supported her interpretation. When the rough cut of the movie was shown, however, Wilder had to admit that Marilyn was instinctively correct in many of her interpretive changes.

"Some Like It Hot" was applauded by audiences and critics alike. As Mailer foresaw, it proved to be the most successful picture Marilyn would ever make.



After accidentally falling from a platform while shooting "Bus Stop" (1956). Marilyn only suffered two scraped knees.

Co-star Don Murray and Marilyn enjoy a light moment during the filming of "Bus Stop" (1956).

